

LBJ Repeatedly Tries To Sell Peace 'Gospel'

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Just about all that a speech can say about peace has been articulated during these past 10 days by President Johnson.

The Johnson peace gospel has pervaded almost every presidential utterance from the most prosaic handout to the return of Gemini 4—from university commencement exercises to gatherings of the Party faithful from the Chicago wards.

If Mr. Johnson has not conducted his crusade through formal channels of diplomacy, he has at least exhausted all the resources of rhetoric.

Prophets Invoked

He has invoked the name of Isaiah, his favorite prophet, as well as Pope John

News Analysis

XXIII, President Kennedy and the verse of an anonymous prophet from Chaldea. The tone has been homespun evangelical—a summons to "open your curtain, come through the doorways and the walls that you've built, and join with us to walk together toward peace..."

Ostensibly, the message has been beamed to the entire Communist world from Eastern Europe to Southeast Asia. But it also seems, in part, designed to soften opposition to Administration foreign policy by such traditionally friendly sovereignties as Britain, France, the U.S. Senate, the New York Times editorial page

and columnist Walter Lippmann.

Untiring repetition is one of the hallmarks of the Johnson style. And it is the view of some who are close to the President that Mr. Johnson's rhetorical offensive on the peace issue was prompted by these considerations:

- It is the President's feeling that the Soviet Union has in the past succeeded in exploiting the peace issue through the various forums of world opinion even though, in his view, the actions of the Soviet government may not always have been consistent with its professed goals. Now, therefore, the President is seeking to seize the initiative in the arena of peace diplomacy.

- The President wants to communicate to the Russians publicly as well as through private channels of contact that, as he sees it, no interest of either the United States or the Soviet Union would be served by major confrontation in Viet-

Nam. This Government is aware, nonetheless, of the pressures on the Soviet Union within the Communist world to make common cause with North Viet-Nam.

- Washington is concerned about what some officials call a "beefing up" of the Soviet military commitment to North Viet-Nam in the form of bombers and missile sites. Nonetheless U.S. policymakers feel there is no alternative to present American strategy in Viet-Nam.

- The President is disappointed that the Administration's efforts in public speeches and through international diplomatic pipelines to "signal" for unconditional discussion in Viet-Nam have met no response from the other side.

Factors in Reiteration

All these elements figure in the President's tireless reiteration of his peace gospel during the past week-and-a-half. It is, at its heart, an effort to maintain a position of sweetness and reasonability even though the hostilities in Southeast Asia continue the course of escalation.

The campaign began, ironically, in one of the Democratic Party's most fiercely partisan precincts—a fundraising dinner of the Cook County, Ill., Democratic organization.

Instead of the expected diet of political raw meat, the President chose the partisan fund-raiser as a forum for announcing withdrawal of 2100 Marines from Santo Domingo and speaking of the desire of "the men and women of Russia—the men and women of all nations of Eastern Europe" for peace.